



PRESS RELEASE

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Health Department Has Flu Response Plan in Place for Vaccine Arrival and Distribution

INDIANAPOLIS - With the first shipment of H1N1 Flu Mist expected next week, local health officials have announced updated information on plans to distribute the vaccine once it is in Indianapolis. The approximate 3,500 doses will be split among local hospitals to vaccinate their critical care employees.

“With a community of 880,000 residents, this is a small amount of vaccine. Because it is a live vaccine, we cannot give it to women who are pregnant or to children and adults with certain chronic medical conditions,” said Virginia A. Caine, M.D., Director, Marion County Health Department. “We felt the best use of this vaccine was to protect those who will be taking care of sick people.”

The Marion County Health Department continues to prepare for the potential impact of the virus on schools, businesses, health care and the general public.

“We as community leaders understand the concern the H1N1 flu is creating,” said Mayor Greg Ballard. “I urge our community to listen and follow the guidance of the Marion County Health Department. We will be asked to take greater responsibility for our own health and that includes staying at home from work and keeping sick children home from school. Together we will protect and take care of each other, which is the greatest characteristic of our community.”

Federal officials predict a mid-October shipment date for the (non-mist) H1N1 flu vaccine. This vaccine can be given to women who are pregnant and children and adults with certain chronic health conditions.

The exact date and how much vaccine will arrive have not been confirmed. The health department will allot H1N1 vaccine for use in schools, in large private healthcare practices, hospitals and community health centers. The health department will also provide H1N1 flu vaccine to the general public through large clinics.

Following federal and state guidance, the Marion County Health Department will provide vaccine to at risk individuals first followed by the general public.

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At risk groups for H1N1 flu include:

- Women who are pregnant
- Household contacts / caregivers of those younger than 6 months old
- Infants and children 6 months to 24 years of age
- Healthcare / Emergency care workers
- Those 25 years old and older with pre-existing, chronic medical conditions
- Healthcare / Emergency care workers without direct patient contact

The health department will announce community H1N1 clinics through the local news media, the health department's www.mchd.com Web site, through the 221-3366 Flu Helpline and through information available from the City of Indianapolis television station, WCTY Channel 16.

The Indianapolis Public Schools have allowed the Marion County Health Department to use IPS School 11, not in use at this time, as a Community H1N1 Vaccine Clinic. This site will allow the health department to provide H1N1 vaccine to the public from a centralized location for an indefinite period of time.

Health officials are also reaching out to local employers, asking them to be aware of employees who may come to work sick and to establish plans in case large numbers of workers are off the job with the flu.

"We want our employers to have an open dialogue with their employees that will not penalize an employee for missing work due to the flu. We also ask employees to be honest with how they are feeling and not report to work while feeling ill," said Dr. Caine.

It's also critical for local businesses to have plans to maintain basic functions in case large numbers of employees are sick.

"H1N1 has the potential to impact lots of people very quickly. We ask our employers to look at their staffing and think how they could maintain critical services with 30-40 percent of their workers sick and off the job," said Dr. Caine.

Local health officials also are concerned that some religious practices, like Communion, could spread the flu virus. While respecting the faith-based community, Dr. Caine says this flu season will cause all of us to look at ways of lowering the risk of transmitting communicable diseases like the flu.

The health department's H1N1 flu response has been active since April. Because the H1N1 flu has impacted school age children, the health department has asked area schools to submit daily attendance reports to help track any increases in absenteeism, especially absences caused by flu-like symptoms. The health department also uses information provided from the emergency departments of local hospitals to track patients and their symptoms coming to area hospitals. In addition, the health department is working with more than a half-dozen physician offices to collect information on patients and reports of flu-like illness.

On September 21 the Marion County Health Department opened its 221-3366 Flu Helpline. The Helpline was first used during the initial wave of H1N1 infection in April and will continue to answer calls throughout the flu season.

Local health officials continue to urge Marion County residents to get their seasonal flu vaccine. The Marion County Health Department will begin its community seasonal flu clinics October 2 and they will continue at convenient sites around the county through October 12. After October 12 residents will be able to get seasonal flu vaccine from the health department's three district health offices.

"Getting a seasonal flu vaccine is the first step to protecting yourself. I encourage everyone in the family to get a seasonal flu shot," said Dr. Caine.

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